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WORKHOUSES.

A CORRESPONDENT from Birmingham asks us to devote a portion of our paper to the question of the general construction of workhouses, how they might be improved, and a general history as to their introduction, &c. We can only say that we should be most happy to do so; but there are many of our readers and correspondents to whom the task would be of great profit and advantage, and we invite them to it. Important consequences would flow from the study and that spirit of reflection and inquiry which it must superinduce. If architects and builders would study the morale of the workhouse system, they would make none the worse plans and structures, but they would most likely become, in addition, the better philanthropists and patriots. Unfortunately, however, it would seem to be considered their duty to meddle with no more than extended to the mediocrity of orders. So that if cages were to be contrived for human incarceration, their only concern would be to be employed, to rack their best ingenuity, and receive their pay. Workhouses, madhouses, and prisons, are what the architects choose to make them, in more senses than one, and it is distressing to think that some of the greatest efforts of the ingenuity of the profession have been exercised in administering to the very questionable policy which prevails in the modern management of these institutions; as an instance, we may refer to the New Model Prison at Pentonville, the work of Major Jebb, military and, in this instance, civil engineer; if report speaks truly, the refinements introduced into that prison, in the way of separating and bedculling the wretched criminals, are so nicely calculated to the line of human endurance, that it has in this instance turned over, and produced insanity. This is fearful, and is a question beyond the brick and mortar into which you shall say it is not our province to intrude? It reminds us of a transatlantic anecdote; all in our own way. It is said that the architect of one of the American prisons had been experimenting, like Major Jebb, in the perfecting the system of solitary confinement, and, anxious to ascertain the result of his expected success, thinking he had so contrived it that the wretch who was to be immured in it could have no object on which to fix his thoughts, beyond himself and his condition—oh, how awful does this read, this compressing the vast infinity of the human soul into one little point, its centre—the architect inquired of one who had been immured in his ingenious cell, how it had impressed him with a feeling of absolute solitude. "Ah," said the criminal, "you are a very clever man, but I can give you a hint. It is all very well to place us in absolute darkness; to that, however, the eye gets accustomed; it is well to make the cell smooth-lined within, without joint or crevice; but a square is not the shape, man; it should be a circle—a hollow globe! As it is, there are the angles in the room to divert oneself with; you should have made it a complete sphere. In the square I could live and commune with its features—in the sphere, I should have gone mad in a week."

How near to this maddening may not the

ingenuity of our architects constantly tend? How much of the intermediate influences of deadening and soul-subduing have they not to answer for? Can they not raise generous emotions; can they not destroy them? A workhouse might, by an elevation of the ingenuity of the architect, be rendered what it purports to be. It would be better to make an architect a Poor-Law Commissioner, than to have the tinkering of Poor-law Commissioners as architects, or architect's masters. However, we shall be most happy to aid in our correspondent's purpose, and wait to see whence proceeds the first effort at a profound handling of the subject.

DURATION OF LIFE AMONGST WORKMEN.

A CORRESPONDENT who signs himself "A toiling son of Adam," is pleased to compliment us on the introduction of the subject of statistics in THE BUILDER of the 25th ult. His view is that "Intemperance in drinking" is one of the main causes accounting for the fearful mortality and shortness of life prevailing among the working classes, inducing, as he says, many diseases, such as rheumatism, gout, scrofula, ulcerated limbs, and giving also "carbuncled visages." The remedy, however, he says, is in their own hands. His words also are—

"I conceive it to be libelling the Deity to suppose he has placed the majority of the human species in a sphere of action inimical to their comfort and happiness, by having to toil for a livelihood. Does not all the knowledge which we can acquire of philosophy and physiology go to demonstrate that the means acquired, in the shape of wages for labour, properly expended and judiciously applied, furnish for the most part all the comforts that are needed for health and enjoyment? and these are certainly the essentials in a state of longevity."

"It has been," says he, "a matter of bitter lament to witness the occasions when some hard-working mechanic who had chanced to outlive the generality of our craft, was obliged to appeal to a parish board for that which a little economy and sobriety observed during his progress through manhood, would have enabled him so much better and independently to have enjoyed, in his own home, a home well stored with many comforts; and with a mind so cultivated by salutary experience as to be able with profit to ruminate on and still enjoy passing events of interest to his class, and to be enabled to take part in the numerous efforts now devised to encourage the workman to look above the degraded, sensual, and half bestial practices, I fear we must acknowledge, it is the habit of too many to acquire."

"Again, as to the sort of occupation which the following of our craft entails upon us, I conceive it, properly pursued, more likely to lengthen than shorten the duration of life; for so long injury can our physical powers suffer from being called to inhale the pure air of the morning, or steadily to pursue our avocations during the rest of the day,—or at night, at a reasonable time, to congregate with our fellow-artisans to improve some mental opportunity, and then retire to enjoy that sound repose which, alas! but few of the rich can so fully participate in, in consequence of the day having been spent in killing time, and seeking pleasure, in ways and scenes which naturally bring disappointment, vexations, and possibly remorse?"

Our correspondent reproaches the practice, arising out of a "mistaken kindness," of fellow-workmen treating with drink those upon "tramp," or in search of employment.—A time, he would observe, when every consideration of prudence, judgment, and reasonable anxiety demands self-denial and circumspection.

THE NEW CHURCH, WOOD-GREEN, TOTTENHAM.

The beautiful church at this place, from the designs of Messrs. Scott and Midant, built by Mr. Jay, of London Wall, demands attention for the very effective expression obtained by the admixture of the Kentish ragstone walling, with a newly-introduced sandstone for the dressings. The tone of colour is highly agreeable, being of a warm brown tint, of mixed ochre and amber, and the stone commends itself the more from the facilities for its importation into the London market. The quarry is not further, we believe, than forty miles distant, being situated at Bromhill, near Speldhurst, in Kent, and favourably for shipment. It is affirmed to be more durable than Bath stone, and yet soft and easy to work. Hardening by exposure, it is particularly well suited for carving and for tracery, as may be seen in the new church at Tonbridge Wells. It is, however, not the least adapted for substantial and massive work, two bridges having been lately erected with it over the river Medway. Of its durability, the best evidence is afforded in many old structures, particularly in the Castle of Tonbridge, which many contend to be a work of about 1,000 years old. The very mouldings of the gateway are still beautifully sharp and fresh. It may be obtained in large sizes, and at moderate cost, and, being cheap to work, will be found a great accession to the London market and district.

VISIT TO YORK OF THE HEALTH OF TOWN'S COMMISSIONERS.—Messrs. Chadwick and Smith were met at York in the most cordial spirit by the members of the excellent corporation of that city. At a meeting of the body, Mr. Smith fully explained the views of the commission, and placed sets of printed questions in the hands of each gentleman, as were most likely to be able to give information on the various points set forth in the interrogatories. These questions have reference to the position of the town and the prevailing character of the country; the liability to floods, obstruction to the waters, drainage, or escape of flood water; the regulations as to drainage generally, public and private, and efficiency (or deficiency) of the construction and clearing of sewers, streets, alleys, &c.; the construction of school-rooms for the labouring classes; also as to the existence of open and convenient spaces for exercise, open bathing places or public baths, as to the supply of water for domestic use, for watering or cleansing the streets, or for the prevention of fire; the position of the water, the mode of distribution, the number of houses in the town and suburbs, in how many of the houses the water is laid on, and as to each house having a separate tank, as to how the poorer classes are supplied, the quantity, quality, and price, the means of redemption in case of undue enhancement of the price, or of the supply being deficient in quantity or inferior in quality, the use of filters in private houses, the provision made in case of fire, the average number of fires in the year and the prevailing causes; as to the stock of engines and firemen, the state of the worst part of the town, and where there is the highest rate of mortality, the average duration of illness among the working classes throughout the year, the general structure and condition of the dwellings of the poorer classes, the number of persons living in one room or house, the ventilation of each room of house, and the state of the labouring classes in winter as to warmth. The questions also refer to the use of gas, the state of the public lodging-houses, the amount of medical advice and assistance afforded gratuitously to the poorer classes, the existence of hospitals, or dispensaries, the regulations they are under, the average number of patients, &c. &c.